

NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

"One interest will prevail . . . Christ our righteousness."

July/August 2008



CALVARY JUSTIFIES LIFE

Justification and the Great Controversy

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“The Lord is Coming. Are You Ready?”

by Shawn Brace

I was talking with a friend of mine recently who told me about a sign he had noticed outside a Seventh-day Adventist church that he just happened to drive by a day earlier. In big, bold letters, the sign read, “The Lord is Coming. Are You Ready?” What would seem like an innocent and oft-asked question to many of us greatly upset my friend. In fact, he was so disturbed by the message the sign bore that he was tempted to pull over right then and there and take the sign down. Fortunately, self-control got the better of him, and he refrained from doing that.

Why do I mention this, and what is it that made my friend so upset? After all, we as Seventh-day Adventists have been proclaiming this urgent message for a long time. We hear it trumpeted from our pulpits on Sabbath mornings around the world. Year after year, it is emphasized at Campmeetings. And certain musical groups have been heralding the sentiment for decades. So, what would get my friend—a faithful and committed Seventh-day Adventist—all up in a tizzy?

Well, truth be told, I happen to agree with my friend’s concerns. And I’d like to share a few reflections with you on the ever-so-subtle dangers that this simple question brings.

To begin with, I’m afraid that such a question elicits an “Uh-oh, I’m in trouble” reaction from the respondent. The underlying idea behind the question is that if a person is not ready when Jesus comes, he or she will not go to heaven. And whenever we approach a concept by placing the consequences at the forefront, we are inherently setting up a

legalistic (or, as some would call it, “Old Covenant”) system of behavior and subtly using fear tactics. And such tactics can be extremely destructive and enslaving.

Don’t get me wrong: there are definite consequences when it comes to a person’s readiness. If one does not have a heart experience with Christ when He comes, there will be no heaven for that person. But such a natural consequence should not be emphasized as a motivation for readiness. Instead, we need to lift up the “love of Christ” which “compels” us (see 2 Corinthians 5:14), if we would expect to see permanently changed hearts and lives. Wagging a stick in front of one’s face is a more appropriate tactic for training a dog than for an intelligent human being who is capable of appreciating Christ’s sacrifice and behaving by love.¹

The other—and perhaps more important—challenge that such a question brings is that it proclaims the inevitability of Christ’s Second Coming, whether or not He has a people who are ready. And such a thought, as we have addressed before in this publication,² is not in accordance with the biblical witness. Revelation tells us that Christ will come when His wife has finally “made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7), not in spite of her readiness. When we set up the idea that Christ will come back, regardless of His bride’s readiness, we subtly shift the responsibility off our plates and onto Christ’s.

Similarly, by focusing on our own individual destiny, rather than Christ’s, we are setting up an egocentric message. If we get so caught up in worrying about our own readiness so that we can

live forever, it is impossible to turn our attention onto Christ’s plight and to appreciate the fact that He is engaged in a “Great Controversy” in which His eternal reputation is at stake.

Of course, I am not wishing to be critical of anyone who has asked this question—and the underlying attitude that such a question betrays. But I would like to encourage others to be very careful in how they explain things. The way we say things is extremely important. And instead of trying to scare people into the Kingdom, perhaps it would be best to uplift the love of Christ as motivation for readiness and emphasize the fact that Christ will not come until His bride is prepared.³

Then, maybe He can actually come.

(Endnotes)

¹ Notice what Ellen White says in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1890), 523: “Love to God is the very foundation of religion. To engage in His service merely from hope of reward or fear of punishment would avail nothing.”

² See Herbert E. Douglass, “What Farmers Tell Us About the End of the World,” *New England Pastor*, May/June (2008): 6.

³ For further reflection on this topic, see my book, *Waiting at the Altar* (Brushton, N.Y.: Teach Services, 2008).

Shawn Brace pastors four congregations in New Hampshire and Vermont. His first book, *Waiting at the Altar*, is available from Teach Services. He and his wife, Camille, live in Warner, New Hampshire, and they enjoy anything involving the outdoors.



Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary—Part 1 *by John McVay*

This article was originally presented as a sermon at the Questions on Doctrine 50th Anniversary

Conference, held at Andrews University, October 24-27, 2007.

—Editors

In a few years of administration, I have learned principally one thing—how little I know. An additional discovery, though, continues to bemuse—and, occasionally, amuse—me. Call it the Hypothesis of Administrative Hiccups. Here it is: A problem is most likely to occur among the experts to whom you would turn to solve it.

Allow me to offer some fictive examples. If you are going to have a really difficult Human Resources problem crop up, it will likely occur at the School of Business, where they teach courses in how to deal with just such challenges. A professor who cannot teach for most of the term because of a severely strained back is likely from the Physical Therapy faculty. If there's going to be a problem with the misuse and abuse of language, it will probably crop up in the Communications Department. A huge malfunction in a complex piece of equipment will, predictably under this hypothesis, occur in the School of Engineering. . . . and so on.

I have tested and proven this hypothesis more times than I care to remember. We pastors and theologians specialize in grace—in understanding and proclaiming the Gospel, the “good news” about what God has done—and is doing—for humankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are the experts in understanding the gracious ways of God as we trace the story of redemption. We are the certified specialists—complete with terminal degrees—in “the fruit of the Spirit”—“love,

joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Are we not an exception to the Hypothesis of Administrative Hiccups?

One could argue that the historical events that we ponder in our conference are rooted in an act of kindness, a demonstration—albeit a small one—of nobility of spirit. A Seventh-day Adventist pastor and Conference President, Elder Unruh tunes his radio to Donald Grey Barnhouse's radio program. He listens in as, broadcast by broadcast, Barnhouse unpacks the message of righteousness by faith in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Unruh's heart is stirred and, in an act of kindness, he pens a letter of thanks to Barnhouse, expressing his deep appreciation for the messages he has heard.

That little act of kindness, of nobility of spirit, triggers the events we ponder here, 50+ years later. So it is no small irony that arguably the most unkind and unchristian communication in our church's history is rooted in Unruh's kind letter to Barnhouse.

I note that the QOD Conference web site begins with these words: “No other book has aroused so much controversy in the history of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church* as *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*.”¹

As I review both recent and not-so-recent history, we Adventist and we Christian theologians have proven the Hypothesis of Administrative Hiccups again and again. As experts in the gracious ways of God, certified specialists in the fruit of the Spirit, we have all-too-often practiced the ways of the Devil and offered up the fruit of hell.

And—need I add—when we do so, we bring the Gospel into disrepute.

So, with the Hypothesis of Administrative Hiccups in view, I invite your attention to a brief passage from the Apostle Paul, Ephesians 4:31-5:2. Allow me to share my translation of the verses:

Let these things be removed from among you: animosity, rage, indignation, angry shouting, and abusive speech, with all ill-will. Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God forgave all of you in Christ. So be imitators of God in the manner of beloved children and live in love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

As you leaf through those first chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians, you will note that they are long on profound theology and steeped in the language of worship. Paul especially exults in God's creation-in-Christ of the church. He marvels at what God has done for Gentile Christians.

It is not until he gets to chapter 4—and well into it at that—that he settles into direct pastoral counsel to those ancient, Christian congregations in Asia Minor.

In the context of a profound exultation for what God has done for us in Christ, Paul gets down to business. And when he gets there—to the rubber-meets-the-road counsel of the letter—he has an amazing amount to say about how we Christians should speak to one another. It is as though Paul says, “Now that you have the theology in hand, let me introduce you to the really difficult stuff—putting it into practice in your relationships with others.”

So perhaps, in the flow of the letter, this challenging, difficult word is truly appropriate for theologians.

Our brief passage consists of one negative command about getting rid of certain things in our community (v. 31), and two positive ones about being kind (v. 32) and being imitators of God (vv. 1, 2).

Look closely with me at verse 31: “Let these things be removed from among you: animosity, rage, indignation, angry shouting, and abusive speech, with all ill-will.” Paul mentions a list of five things

that he would like to see absent from the Christian congregations in Asia Minor and summarizes them in a final term—ill-will. His list begins with three strident terms: animosity, rage, and indignation. He begins deep within our hearts and minds. He identifies strong, negative emotions and attitudes, ones that seethe beneath the surface of our sophisticated exteriors.

A little while back, Southern California suffered the ravages of a gargantuan set of fires, which raged out-of-control. Twenty-three fires scorched nearly 500,000 acres or about 750 square miles, an area approaching the size of the state of Rhode Island. The price tag? Over \$1 billion. Fourteen deaths were credited—directly or indirectly—to the flames. A firefighter was quoted as saying, “It’s like holding off hell with a garden hose.”²

Paul worries about an analogous maelstrom, which threatens to char the subterranean landscape of our minds just as surely as those 23 fires devastated the California terrain. And he worries that those subterranean fires will erupt into flows of destructive, molten lava. The deep-seated, destructive attitudes—animosity, rage, indignation—will, eventually, be expressed through “angry shouting, and abusive speech,” yielding a storm of ill-will.

Some time ago, I had the privilege of listening to one of the sessions of the most recent HMS Richards Lectureship on Preaching hosted annually at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. The speaker was Dr. Paul Scott Wilson, Professor of Homiletics at Emmanuel College, Toronto, and author of several books on preaching, including *The Four Pages of the Sermon* and *The Practice of Preaching*.

I found the counsel that he offered preachers to be simple and profound. Here is one such word of counsel: “Seek the Gospel in the text.”

Where do you find the Gospel in a

negative command like this one? “Let these things be removed from among you: animosity, rage, indignation, angry shouting, and abusive speech, with all ill-will.”

**We are not
being asked to
pull ourselves
up by our
bootstraps,
to fix our
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to cure our
own ills. We
are pointed
beyond our
own resources
to the gracious
actions of God
in Christ Jesus.**

Granted, the command does not seem too difficult . . . as long as you don’t have any animosity, rage, indignation, angry shouting, and abusive speech in your life. But what if—as you take that interior look—you see a destructive firestorm ablaze?

Where’s the Gospel in a text like this, then?

Don’t do it! (But you’re doing it.)

The verse is often translated something like this: “Put away from you all bitterness . . .” etc. In my translation, I’ve tried to listen to a Gospel cue in the grammar. Surely some Greek teacher out there will arise and call me blessed for finding the Gospel in Greek! The verb here is *airo*. It literally means, “I lift up, pick up, remove.” The form here is passive imperative one. Literally, the command is not: “You—remove these things from your heart.” Rather, it is “Let these things be removed from among you.”

The point is grammatically subtle and may be nothing more than “stylistic variation.”³ But from the standpoint of a Gospel reading of the text, it is a rather large difference indeed. We are not being asked to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, to fix our problems, to cure our own ills. We are pointed beyond our own resources to the gracious actions of God in Christ Jesus. Every command, you see, is a promise: “Let these things be removed from among you: animosity, rage, indignation, angry shouting, and abusive speech, with all ill-will.”

(Endnotes)

¹ Taken from <http://www.qod.andrews.edu/>. Accessed 10-24-07.

² Taken from <http://www.cnn.com/>. Accessed 10-25-07.

³ Andrews T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 308.

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Calvary Justifies Life: Justification and the Great Controversy

By Paul E. Penno

The
subject of
temporary,

universal justification

of life for all men is one of the big ideas which God invites us to wrap our minds around. God's government is under an all-out assault from Satan in an ideological warfare of ideas to annihilate it.

When God commanded Adam not to eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, . . . for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:17),¹ it is true that Adam died spiritually; but more profoundly, God told the truth and He had reference to literal, physical, eternal death. Adam sinned and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Why wasn't Adam struck dead?

The reason is that before the creation of the world, God, the Father and God, the Son made a promise—or covenant to one another—as they were planning the creation of free-will agents to live in an environment of God's love on the earth. The Son pledged Himself as Surety for man, should he choose to sin. Since the first man, Adam, was the head of the new race of intelligent beings, should he sin, Satan would demand that sinning Adam receive his just reward by instant death.

God's ways are always just and true. He must legitimize sinning man's survival of eternal death. He did this on the basis of the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son. God justified the existence of fallen man by means of the last Adam, Jesus Christ. God's government justified the existence of sinful man on the pledged Lamb's death for sin from the foundation of the world. "Ye were . . . redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:18-20),²

No society or government can exist without the rule of law and a court system to adjudicate and administer the law. God's government is no exception. It is not by sheer despotic force that God maintains sinful man's existence in the eyes of sentient cosmic beings, angels, and demonic principalities and powers. It is some form of democracy which acclaims and perceives that He is acting upon the rule of law and yet dealing mercifully with the erring, giving them a second probation because of their representative Head.

Why did Christ teach Nicodemus the truth of the most well-beloved and memorized verse in all of the Bible, John 3:16? It must have been because of a deep theological misunderstanding which Nicodemus had regarding God's dealings with the world. Jesus told him, "For God so loved the world."

Nicodemus believed, as did all the religious leaders and elite of Judaism, that God's covenant with Israel meant that they were the only elect ones for salvation. Nicodemus was the Calvinist of his day. Only the Jews were predestined for eternal life. All the Gentiles were predestined for damnation and destruction.

This theology continues to this day in the great systems of religion, including Catholicism and Protestantism. Its Protestant representatives are Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, Reformed Church, etc.

The other evangelical counterpoint to this is Arminianism, which arose during the seventeenth century in Europe, and which saw the universal dimensions of Christ's death for the world. It teaches that Christ's death was sufficient to embrace everyone, but it is not effective until faith is exercised by the recipient. In other words, Christ offers salvation to all. The atoning sacrifice is an atonement for sin, provided one believes. So there is prevenient grace

and means by which God has of reaching mankind with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But man must choose to believe the provisional gift. This might be expressed in terms of showing a genuine proffer of building a relationship with God.

However, Jesus taught the pure truth to Nicodemus when He said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Christ is God's gift to the world. This gift has a legal basis in that Christ has been constituted Head of the race; and this gift is voluntary in that Christ, of His own volition, and motivated by love, pledged Himself as Surety for sinners.

Christ uses a legal term to indicate what this means for the world. "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). If the world had been condemned by God in sending His Son, then it would have been instantly destroyed for its sin. But it does not stand in a judicial state of condemnation, because it is not condemned. The extent of this Divine judicial action embraces the totality of the world.

Jesus went on to teach, however, that the present, individual choices with respect to God's gift of Christ, short-circuits God's pardon. "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Thus, the future day of judgment for the unbeliever becomes a present reality of condemnation. Nevertheless, the probationer continues to live briefly by the gracious life of God given to him or her; and at any time prior to death or the coming of Christ, one may choose life in the Son (see John 3:36).

The epistle to the Romans contains the teaching of God's universal justification for the existence of all sinful life. Notice that the first half of Romans 3:23 contains

the word “all” which is understood as the subject of the last half of the sentence. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [the “all” are] being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23, 24). It isn’t difficult to see that without exception, everyone born into the world has sinned. It is the “all [who] have sinned” that are “being justified.” This, of course, is a legal term meaning pardoned from sin on the basis of a redemptive price paid by Christ. As an objective legal reality, all human life is acquitted from sin because of the redemption of the cross.

“Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The “ungodly” are the impiously wicked. This is the natural inheritance from Adam of all who come into the world. But “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). There is no need to emphasize that the class of “sinners” involves all for whom Christ died.

Furthermore, “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (vs. 10). So the whole class of sinners, as enemies of God, were “reconciled,” (past tense), “by the death of His Son.” The notion of enemies being in a state of hostility toward God requires a legal settlement of hostilities, as well as a pathway to experience a restoration of peace. God has set forth the judicial peace at Calvary. This initiates the road map to experience peace by which we are “being reconciled” to God and “shall be saved by His life” (vs. 10).

Paul forthrightly states the objective, legal setting-right of the race in Rom. 5:18: “Therefore as by the offence of one, *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation [*katakrima* is the punishment of eternal death]; even so by the righteousness of one, *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.” Adam’s one sin was judged (vs. 16) by God, and he was pronounced guilty for his personal sin. But since he was the fountainhead of the whole human family and could only pass on to his descendants

that which was in him, “all men” receive “condemnation” (i.e., the punishment, meaning eternal death).

However, Adam’s one offence is reversed by “the righteousness of one” which is “upon all men unto justification of life” (vs. 18).³ There is a reference here to “one act of righteousness” [see margin of KJV]; that is, one judgment or decision. Obviously it was the Divine judgment against sin, which act was publicly displayed before the world at the cross. He received the punishment for all the world’s sin. The Divine wrath against sin was executed upon Christ.

The cross was not done in a corner. Satan saw it. The angels beheld their beloved commander crucified. Our human representatives were there as eyewitnesses. It has been recorded as a witness for eternity in the Sacred Word. By means of the cross of Christ, it came “upon all men unto justification of life” (vs. 18). All of human life, both in the past, present, and future, exists because it is justified by the cross. Calvary justifies the existence of all life. So when reference is made to “justification of life,” it is a specific Scriptural term for the legal reality of legitimizing, from God’s standpoint in His government, and because of the great controversy with Satan, why He has given a second probation to sinful mankind. And this temporary probationary life of each individual is a real pardon from sin whether he or she is a believer or an unbeliever. It is a reality that goes far beyond the enjoyment of bread, food, family, loving relationships, a semblance of societal bliss, an accommodation of living within laws of social respect, etc. It goes far beyond making it possible for God to treat sinners in Christ as though they had never sinned. It is a fundamental answer to Satan’s charges to destroy sinners immediately if God’s government is one of law and order.

The cross of Christ is the legal justification for the existence of life on this earth in the face of sin. It adequately explains how God can maintain the

temporal existence of sinners in view of the accusations of Satan that He must execute the punishment due sinners, which is eternal death.

The story is told of a prisoner who sat in his death cell awaiting execution. One day a clergyman bearing a message from the governor came to see the prisoner. As the clergyman entered the prisoner’s cell, the prisoner shouted, “I don’t want to see you. I need none of your prayers.”

“But,” the minister insisted, “I have a message for you from the governor.”

When he handed the prisoner an envelope, the convict shouted, “Take it away! I don’t want to hear anything from him, either.”

Greatly disappointed, the minister left with the message still in his pocket. Later the warden told the prisoner, “The message you refused from the governor contained your pardon!”

It is said that when he was executed, the prisoner’s last words were: “I’m dying not because I murdered a man, but because I refused a pardon.”

(Endnotes)

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are taken from the *King James Version*.

² See also E. J. Waggoner, “Studies in Romans. The Free Gift,” *The Signs of the Times*, 12 March 1896, 164, 165: “There is no exception here. As the condemnation came upon all, so the justification comes upon all. Christ has tasted death for every man. He has given himself for all. Nay, he has given himself to every man. The free gift has come upon all. The fact that it is a free gift is evidence that there is no exception. If it came upon only those who have some special qualification, then it would not be a free gift. It is a fact, therefore, plainly stated in the Bible, that the gift of righteousness and life in Christ has come to every man on earth. There is not the slightest reason why every man that has ever lived should not be saved unto eternal life, except that they would not have it.”

³ See Ibid.

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Watch *by Matt Kohls*

W_{atch.}

We humans do a lot of watching.

Sports, movies, what we eat, our weight. We even do what we refer to as “people watching.”

The airport is a favorite place for the hobby of people watching. Have you ever just sat off to the side of an airport terminal and watched the people going by? One of the strange new phenomena that I’ve observed as I’ve people watched in recent years is the business person with his or her Bluetooth headset. It makes me smile when I see perfectly normal-looking adults standing all by themselves and just talking into the air, making gestures with their hands to emphasize their point to whoever is on the other end of the line, perhaps hundreds of miles away. It always looks as if they’re talking to themselves.

The airport is not the only spot where we spend our time people watching. There are so many things to keep an eye on if we want to be “in the loop.” We need to see what everyone else is wearing, driving, or doing with their lives. We watch our fellow men and women acting out the comedies and dramas of life in an endless round of movies and TV. We watch to see what other people might be thinking when they watch us. We watch our families grow and change, and sometimes we are startled to watch ourselves in the mirror doing the same thing.

With all of the watching we do, it seems as though it would be an easy task to follow Jesus’ command in Matthew 24:42: “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”¹ Apparently Jesus, as well as Peter and Paul, didn’t think it would be all that easy for us. Together, they remind us nineteen times in the New Testament to watch.

The word “watch” they use means to stay awake. “Keep your eyes open!” we hear them say. “Don’t sleep. There is too much happening that you don’t want to miss.”

When I was growing up, my family used to watch the ball drop at midnight on New Year’s Eve. I fought tooth and nail to stay awake until that time. Sometimes it was all I could do not to just lie down on the floor and give in to the sweet rest that beckoned me. But I wanted so badly to be awake and aware of that special moment when the old year vanished away and the new one began.

Jesus feels the same way about His coming. He desperately wants us to be awake and aware of that moment when the old life we know here on Earth, with its pain and suffering, loneliness and death, vanishes away, and the endless possibility of eternity begins. So He bids us watch. “Stay awake. I’m coming.”

Sadly, many of us are sleeping, and even those who do watch are not always watching for the right thing or for the right reason. Some people are watching out of anxiety and a determination to prepare themselves for the fearful events that the Bible reveals will take place in the time before Jesus returns. They watch for all the signs to take place that will precede the coming of Christ. They watch the evening news, the weather, the web-sites of the conspiracy theorists, and the movements of governments and religious leaders. And yet, they are not seeking to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The problem is not so much with desiring to know when Jesus is coming. The problem is that with all of the people and weather watching they do, they do not have their eyes on Jesus. They are not watching for their Lord and Friend.

Sometimes people do watch for Jesus Himself, but they do it the way my sisters and I watched for my parents to come

home after their evenings out. When we were old enough to be left alone at home, my parents would go out on a date once in a while and leave us to ourselves. We’d all act normal until we saw the car drive past the front windows of the house as my parents pulled out of the driveway. Then the four of us would crowd onto our little front porch to watch them turn the corner at the end of the street. As soon as the taillights disappeared around the bend, we all yelled in unison, “PARTY TIME!”

I’d grab the broom from beside the refrigerator and start jamming on my “guitar” as we danced around the table singing, “Party time! Party time!” We’d turn up the stereo extra loud and begin our favorite parentless pastime. One of us would turn on the ceiling fan hanging over the kitchen table. Then, we’d take a damp dishcloth from the sink and throw it up into the spinning blades whirring in the middle of the room. The fan would catch the cloth, spin it around a couple times, and then fling it against the wall or into some corner of the room. We’d laugh hysterically and race to grab the cloth so we could do it again, over and over.

My parents usually told us about what time they should be home, so a few minutes before their expected time of arrival, we’d start watching out the window to spot them if they arrived early. When the time came even nearer, we would clean up our messes, put away the dishcloth, and take up an “innocent” activity that we hoped our parents would think we had been enjoying the whole time they’d been gone.

Our strategy usually worked, unless my parents forgot something and came back for it. We would just be getting into full party mode when all of a sudden we’d hear the car pulling into the driveway. There’d be screaming and scrambling to turn off the stereo, throw the dishcloth into

the sink, hit the switch for the fan, and plop onto the couch just as the door knob turned and the door swung open. I'm sure we looked a little too innocent all sitting there on the couch smiling, as the ceiling fan mysteriously spun its last few turns and came to a stop.

This is the same kind of "watching" that some people are doing today. Yes, they are watching for Jesus personally to return, but they want to know when He is coming home so that they don't get caught doing something they know He wouldn't approve of. They think that when they are sure He is coming, there will be time to clean everything up and find an innocent-looking activity to be doing when He arrives.

Sadly, neither of the examples above is truly "watching" the way Jesus intended. Watching the signs for the sake of preparing ourselves to survive the end times, or watching for Jesus to be sure we get all the pleasure we can out of sin but still clean up in time, is totally missing the point of what it really means to be a Christian. A Christian is someone who is wrapped up in an eternal friendship with Jesus that begins here on Earth (John 17:3). When we have a precious friend who has been away on a long trip, and we know the person is returning soon, we watch for that friend, not in fear of his or her return, or in an attempt to clean up for the friend's arrival, but in anticipation of our joyful reunion.

For true Christians, watching for

Some people are watching out of anxiety and a determination to prepare themselves for the fearful events that the Bible reveals will take place in the time before Jesus returns.

Jesus to return is like watching for a loved one we are picking up at the airport. We keep in touch while we are apart, and the time comes when the person tells us, "I am coming home soon; will you meet me at the airport?" The day of their arrival, we enter the baggage claim area and are met by a sea of humanity surging toward us in wave after wave of arriving flights. Our eyes anxiously scan the crowd of people exiting the terminal, looking for

that familiar face among all the strangers. After what seems like an eternity, we finally catch a glimpse of the one we know so well while the person is still some distance away. Our eyes meet and the smile of recognition and excitement comes immediately to both of our faces. We try to play it cool, walking forward to meet our loved one, but soon all self-restraint breaks down and we run to meet each other, colliding in a tangle of arms and legs, backpacks and duffle bags, hearts bursting with joy.

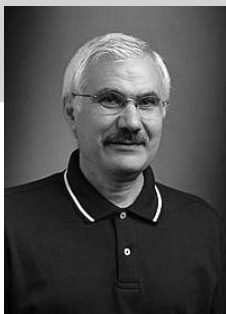
Are you watching for His return? Does the nearness of His coming send a chill down your spine and a sense of desperation to get everything cleaned up for His arrival? Or does it make your heart beat faster in anticipation of the reunion you will soon have with the Friend you know and love? Get to know Him in a personal way today. Why wait to wake up to the relationship He longs to have with you? "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).

(Endnotes)

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are taken from the *New King James Version*.

Matt Kohls, who grew up in Maine, teaches 7th and 8th grade in Lansing, Michigan, and is passionate about helping students develop a love relationship with Jesus. He is married to his best friend, Leah, and enjoys camping, kayaking, and traveling with her in his free time. Matt considers himself a missionary to Michigan.

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Escape From Iraq—Part 2 by S. Joseph Kidder

This article is Part 2 of a two-part series. Part 1 was in the May/June 2008 issue, also available at

www.newenglandpastor.com.

—Editors

When I came to consciousness, I found myself out in the street. It was dark and cold. I was confused and under severe pressure. The first question that came to my mind was, “If I am doing all the right things, why are all the wrong things happening to me?” Everything I was afraid would happen had happened. I lost two years at the University. I lost the scholarship that covered four years of college education. I lost my friends, family, and relatives. It was very difficult to feel the rejection and to feel that nobody wanted to associate with me.

Then the Lord impressed me to go to an Adventist family that had taken an interest in me. They were wonderful. They took me in and took care of me. They provided for my physical needs by giving me a place to stay and food to eat. They also encouraged me emotionally and spiritually. They prayed with me, read the Bible to me, and shared the promises of Jesus with me. One of the promises that we read over and over is the one found in Romans 8:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him, graciously give up all things? Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that

neither death, nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-38)

These promises brought peace to my heart and soul. They assured me that, though everyone was gone and far away, Jesus was still there, very close to me.

When this family and I recognized that I had no future in my country, they suggested that I go to Middle East College (the Adventist college in Beirut, Lebanon) to study.

But I couldn’t go the Middle East College because it was not accredited. Any college I went to had to be recognized by Iraq in order for them to give me an exit visa and allow me to study in a college outside of my country. To top all these problems, I got a notice that I had to go to serve in the army because of the two years I had lost in college.

When my father found out about these problems, he sent a message to me saying, “I told you so. Just forget about the whole mess you got yourself into, and we will accept you back. We will even arrange for you to go outside the county to study.” It was tempting—but praise the Lord for His grace that gives us extra power and the community of faith that lift us up by their love and encouragement.

When I received this message and when I learned of the army problem and bearing arms and fighting, I reflected on the last few months of my life. I had lost everything—family and friends, and scholarship and education. I could not leave the country and go somewhere else. Instead, I was going to the army to face endless problems. I was down and discouraged.

But in the midst of all of this, the promise that sustained me was Isaiah 59:1:

“Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.” God, who is faithful to His promises, heard my prayers and extended His arm to solve my difficulties.

It was at that time that the 1973 war between the Arab countries (which Iraq is part of) and Israel started. My neighbor was drafted into the army. He went into the first wave, and I was going in the second wave. The news came back that he had been killed. My mother went to the memorial service and was emotionally moved. The death of my neighbor affected my mother very deeply and she wanted to see me very badly. She said to my father, “I do not care if he is Adventist or not . . . at least he is alive. I want him back home.” It took some convincing, but eventually I returned home.

When I was out in the street after my parents beat me, kicked me out, and humiliated me, I was wondering why all of this had happened to me. I even asked myself, “Am I doing the right thing?” When I came back home, I know how God used this experience for His glory.

It was about 10:30 p.m. on the first night I came home. I was already in bed when my cousin and my brother, who had started the beating, came to me and said, “We need to go for a walk.” I was scared. I thought they had found a way to kill me and get away with it. So I refused. But they forced me.

We walked about four miles to a park. By the time we got to the park, it was about midnight. The place was dark. I closed my eyes, anticipating the worse. I can still hear the voice of my cousin saying, “Look, we saw what happened to you. We saw how everyone humiliated you, spit on you, and beat you. Why? You are either crazy or have something we’d like to have, too.”

This gave me the opportunity to study the Bible with them. My brother joined the church. And my cousin is, right now, the pastor of the church in Baghdad. And

as a result of their ministry, many more members of my family have joined the church.

It is interesting to note that my neighbor, whom they had the memorial service for, was later discovered to be alive. It was a case of mistaken identity. But the Lord used the bad news to bring good news to me.

So many times we look at the course of our lives and feel discouraged because our plans are failing, because we have problem after problem. We are upset because for some reason or another, God's plans are not what we want. But the right attitude is not to look to our problems, difficulties, and failures, but to Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith. The Lord used all my problems to His glory and for my own good.

It was at that time that the family I was staying with said, "We have tried everything to get Middle East College (MEC) to be accredited and have failed. Let us get the whole church to pray and fast for three days." For a year everything the church tried to get MEC accredited had failed, but miraculously prayer got Middle East College to be accredited by Iraq, and that gave me the opportunity to go and study there.

Something else: the two years I had lost in the university later proved to be a blessing for me. If I had taken the exams on the Sabbath day and passed, the government would not have allowed me to go and study outside the country because they had paid for my scholarship, and the stipulation was that after graduation I had to work for them at least four years. That also took care of the army problem because, if I was studying, I did not have to go into the army.

I still must tell you how I am alive today because of the beating and humiliation. I went to Lebanon to continue my education. But shortly after arriving at Middle East College, the Lebanese Civil

War started. I lived a very tense and fearful life for a year and a half. The war got worse and worse, so I had to leave. I was forced to look for an education somewhere else.

Someone suggested that I go to Walla Walla College since I was interested in engineering. When I talked to someone

God, who is faithful to His promises, heard my prayers and extended His arm to solve my difficulties.

about the possibility of going to Walla Walla to study engineering, he said it was easier for Moses to take the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land than for me to go to study in the United States. I did not know the language. I did not have money. And neither Iraq nor the United States would grant me a visa.

I went back to Iraq, and the family that I had stayed with when I was kicked out of my home, said, "Let us go back to prayer." Prayer found a sponsor for me in the United States and made Saddam Hussain (who, in 1976, was the prime Minister of Iraq) sign my passport to be able to come here.

I came to this country with a half dollar in my pocket and virtually not knowing the

language. I spent four years with language problems and financial difficulties. But the Lord was always with me and helped me to finish my college education with two degrees, theology and engineering. During my college years I felt a strong call to the ministry, so upon my graduation I went straight into the ministry and started at one of the Adventist churches in Spokane, Washington. Then in 1996, when I went to the Seminary to graduate with the Doctoral degree, I went to visit with my cousins who live outside of Detroit. One of them had just come back from visiting with my family. At the beginning I said, "I am alive today because I was beaten, spit upon, and humiliated. Now I am going to tell you why."

My mother told my cousins, "Now I know that the Lord was guiding my son to do what he did." She continued to say, "I am very glad that we beat him up and spit on him and kicked him out of the home. He is alive today because of that."

The reason? Shortly after I left the country and came to the United States, Iraq started a war with its neighbor, Iran. As soon as that war ended, Iraq invaded its neighbor, Kuwait, and ended up fighting the United States. Since that time, over one million Iraqi people were killed and over a half million were injured. The vast majority of them are in my age group.

My mother continues to say, "I thank God every day that my son is alive and does not have to go through all these problems. The Lord was guiding him to keep the Sabbath." My cousin said my mother was studying the Bible with the Adventist pastor and goes to the Adventist church.

Lessons Learned

First, I learned to accept and live by the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Each one is confronted with some kind of lordship test—obedience, Sabbath, tithing, discipline, etc. I learned from this experience that

living by the command of Jesus Christ is the end aim of Christianity. The heart of the Lordship issue is trust. God is asking each one of us, "Who is number one in your life?" Then, I learned to focus on Jesus Christ. We often focus on our problems. For many years in my life I believed in a very small God. Notwithstanding, the God we worship is a great God who can do the impossible, move mountains, and kill giants. He is the Creator. He is in control of the entire universe as well as our own little world.

How big is your God? For years I postponed my decision to follow Jesus, fearing the consequences. Everything I was afraid would happen, happened. But the great and awesome God we serve made all things work for good for His glory and for my own benefit, as well as my family's benefit

Moreover, I learned the power of the promises of God. There are 3,173 promises, as someone has said, to meet every need. I do not think I could have made it without these promises. Reading them and claiming them are two different things. Learn the promises. Memorize them. Live by them.

I also learned the discipline of patience and timing. When I accepted the Lordship

of Jesus Christ and decided to obey Him, I had no idea that that experience would influence my brother and cousins' decisions or that I would be alive today because of it. In the case of myself being alive, I did not know about that till over 25 years from the time I was beaten and humiliated.

We want immediate results, immediate gratification, immediate payoff. "Be still and know that I am God," the Lord says. "Wait upon me. Trust me. I will take care of you." Trust and patience are intertwined. Some of God's leading we are not going to know about till we hit glory and sit at that great table and hear Jesus explain His leading in our lives

Finally I learned the power of prayer. Prayer is feeling the presence of God. Prayer got Middle East College accredited. Prayer gave me an exit visa. Prayer provided for my needs. Prayer provided a sponsor for me in the United States. Prayer can change your life, solve your problems, bring Jesus closer to you, and help you feel His power and His presence. There might be someone who is struggling with the issue of keeping the Sabbath or obedience or lordship or commitment. I invite you today to break away, take your first step and follow Jesus. He is worth it. He will take

care of you.

I have followed Jesus for many years. My understanding of Him and His love have increased over the years. The more I know Him, the more my appreciation and love for Him increase, and the more I discover that He loves me and wants the best for me. More and more over the years I have felt deeply that He is everything to me. He is my brother and sister. He is my father and mother. He is my best friend, the one I can go to and share all my problems and all my joys with. The more I know Him, the more I feel He is my Lord and Savior.

Is it worth it to follow Jesus? Is it worth it to go through trouble? Yes, indeed!

Millions and millions and millions throughout the ages and all over the world add their testimony to mine and say, "Yes, indeed! It is worth it to follow Jesus." Will you follow Him today and be obedient to Him?

S. Joseph Kidder, D.Min., has been teaching in the area of spiritual formation, evangelism, and leadership at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary for the last eight years. Prior to that he pastored for 20 years. His wife, Denise, is an elementary school teacher. They live in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and they have two children, Jason and Stephanie.

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Realism and Totality: Give Them Some Thought

by Bill Brace

Realistically, who cares about realism and totality these days? And what do those words and ideas mean in the first place, especially in the context of the gospel? Well, perhaps more than we realize.

Let's admit it: reality shows on television, or what is being advertised as such, cause us to be confused about the topic. Ditto for romantic love presented today as the real thing. And, most importantly, where do these trends lead us, or leave us, in relationship to the aforementioned questions? Unfortunately, also, as opposed to what the biblical concepts of reality and totality reveal to us about God and the gospel, humankind, and I speak specifically of Occidental man, is fast headed—fueled by both humanistic philosophy and the media—to a state of non-personhood.

Now bear with me for a few more moments. Yes, I know at this point you may be somewhat puzzled by all the aforementioned gobbledygook, but I have an important point to make, and it is this: the message of Seventh-day Adventism, articulated in Revelation 14:6 as the “everlasting gospel,” is the final work of God to restore man to wholeness after the gargantuan disruption of his character caused by six thousand years of sin. The truth of the gospel—in the setting of the Most Holy Place ministry of Jesus, which is so unique in present theology—is, in fact, the final maturation of the entire biblical message of restoration.

Now, if I understand correctly, the

Hebraic mind of the Old Testament knew reality and totality as those truths related to God. That is first evidenced at creation. (And the Hebrews were very much creationists. Are we still likewise?) In this context, Genesis 2:7 had/has great meaning and significance—much, much, more, perhaps, than we today ever begin to realize at this station of our personal and denominational development. There, we are told, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul [being]” (KJV). Unfortunately, Greek/Hellenistic thinking and philosophy, having made inroads upon Christianity (recently admitted to by none other than the Roman Catholic Church!), have fostered not only a misunderstanding and an erroneous teaching that has to do with the state of the dead, but also an incomplete picture of the very gospel itself.

In an earlier issue of our magazine, Clinton Baldwin presented a case for what has been termed by some biblical scholars as “corporate justification” or “legal justification.” His rationale for this truth was right on target. You see, he argued for it, quite correctly, in the context of biblical reality. (If you still have that issue on your shelf, go back and read his article once again.) Thus, justification is not dependent upon my faith to make it a reality any more than the things of nature are dependent upon my perceptions to make them a reality. Confusion upon this truth has

been caused by the Greek philosophy of disruption and abstraction. Abraham, a creationist who understood the realism and totality of Genesis 2:7 and also the father of the Hebrews, saw this truth of reality, and that is why his response of belief in Genesis 15:6—a resounding “amen”—was simply an affirmation of the reality of God and the reality of His promise (covenant or gospel).

So, did God justify the world “in Christ,” the One slain from its foundation? Absolutely! That is a reality and a heartwarming one. My appreciation (which we call “faith”) of that reality is indeed an important response, which also denotes the very essence of my personhood. That can never be minimized. However, it does not make justification a reality any more than my faith in God makes Him a reality.

Let me, in closing, stimulate your thinking. I am convinced that Genesis 2:7 has a much broader basis for our theology, especially as it relates to the great message of the gospel, than we have heretofore realized. And, isn't that verse a very revelation of the gospel itself? (Remember, God cannot be separated from the gospel. It is, after all, the essence of His being.) Unfortunately, the Greek philosophy of abstraction has hindered us maybe more than we have understood. It has tempted us toward the ditches of both materialism and spiritualism and away from totality. The latter attraction of spiritualism, as it relates to the reality of God and the gospel, is especially to be feared. Didn't

the modern prophet among us warn about this subtle, last deception?¹

May we keep studying and dialoguing. We need one another!

(Endnotes)

¹ For more on this important topic, I would refer you to the books of Carsten Johnsen, former Andrews University

Seminary professor. He has written several, including *The Maligned God* (Sisteron, France: The Untold Story Publishers, 1980); *Agape and Eros* (Loma Linda, Calif.: The Untold Story Publishers, 1982); *Man: The Indivisible Totality versus Disruption in the History of Western Thought* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971). I heartily recommend them to you, though I must admit that I have never completely conquered the latter!

Bill Brace has been involved in urban ministry for over twenty-five years. He pastors Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Braintree and Norwood, Massachusetts. In addition, he maintains an active radio ministry. His program "Portraits of God" is currently heard on several stations around the United States. He and his wife, Melanie, live in Norfolk, Massachusetts, and they have three grown children, one son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, and a beautiful granddaughter.

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